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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 000639

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: A SPLENDID LITTLE VISIT, FOR CUBA

REF: HAVANA 616 ("EUROS REASSESS RELATIONS WITH CUBAN  
OPPOSITION")

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Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The visit by the Spanish Foreign Minister to Cuba highlighted the differences that have emerged among the Europeans, in particular, on how to nudge Cuba most effectively towards political reform. Foreign Minister Moratinos committed Spain to diluting the EU's emphasis on human rights during its 2010 presidency, a move which will placate the GOC. Although Spain convinced the GOC to address its trade accounts and to release a political prisoner, Cuba may have bagged the bigger prize by putting the EU Cuba split front and center. END SUMMARY.

THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT  
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¶2. (SBU) During his October 17 to 19 visit to Cuba, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos met with President Raul Castro, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, and the resident diplomatic community, at a reception organized by the Government of Cuba's (GOC) Foreign Relations Ministry. (Note: USINT was not invited.) Moratinos also met with the local Spanish business association, and reportedly told them that he would obtain assurances from the GOC on some \$300 million in outstanding bills for services and exports. Moratinos had last visited Cuba in 2007.

¶3. (SBU) During the visit, Moratinos stated that Spain was against the EU's present position on Cuba, noting that it was counterproductive to promoting political reform in the island. He vowed to lead a campaign to repeal the EU Common Position during Spain's 2009 EU presidency. Upon Moratinos' departure, the GOC released one of the famed "Group of 75" of political prisoners who had been jailed in 2003 (53 remain in detention), and allowed another dissident to leave the country. The Spanish also claimed credit for getting a travel permit for the wife of Oscar Biscet, another jailed 75er, but she had a GOC-issued exit permit before Moratinos' visit.

LOBBYING SPAIN TO SPLIT THE COMMON POLICY

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¶4. (C) The Spanish Polcouns in Havana told us that the GOC had lobbied Spain hard to come out publicly against the EU's Common Position during the visit. "The Cubans strongly object to the Common Position," the Spanish Polcouns told us. "They call it 'unilateral' and 'interventionist'." The 1996 statement of principles, which Spain championed at the time, commits the EU to "encourage a process of transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms," and to "remind the Cuban authorities, both publicly and privately, of (its) fundamental responsibilities regarding human rights," among other things.

¶5. (SBU) Through his visit, Moratinos vowed to do away with the Common Position, stating that existing mechanisms like existing EU-Switzerland-Norway seminars (which focus on cultural, social and economic rights), and the stalled Political Dialogue could address the Europeans' human rights concerns with Cuba. He also suggested a bilateral agreement, like the one the EU has with Chile, could replace the Common Position.

#### LITTLE HOPES THAT THE COMMON POLICY WILL CHANGE

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¶6. (C) Notwithstanding Spain's efforts, both our Spanish and our EU colleagues agree that the Common Position is unlikely to be abandoned anytime soon, even under a Spanish presidency. "For us it was a matter of principle and so, there, we said it, and that was it," the Spanish Polcouns told us. He recognized that strong opposition from the UK, Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic, among others, would make it nearly impossible to change the Common Position. His

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counterparts from those countries agree. The German number-two said he expected Spain to try to weaken the Common Position but wished them "good luck" in their efforts. "As long as one says no, there will be no change, and we continue to stand by" the Common Position, he said. Spain's hope, its Polcouns confided, is that the GOC continues to extend more goodwill gestures in the immediate future. "In order for us to convince the other (EU) members, (the Cubans) know that they would need to release many more prisoners," he added.

#### CUBA TRIES TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER

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¶7. (C) Apart from its lobbying efforts with Spain, the GOC has been trying to lobby the Europeans one by one. Starting this summer, the GOC began approaching European missions (not just those of the EU) individually in Havana, and presenting them with a draft of a one-page memorandum of understanding between Cuba and each particular country. Although we have not seen the draft, a colleague from another mission who has told us that it is a simply-worded, one-page document that commits both parties to non-intervention in each other's domestic affairs. According to her, many of her colleagues believe that the MOU is an attempt by the GOC to check further discussions on human rights, regardless of what happens with the Common Position. She told us that she knew first-hand that the UK, France, Spain, Portugal and Norway had been presented with MOUs, and that Portugal and Spain had signed theirs.

#### CIVIL SOCIETY LESS THAN IMPRESSED WITH SPANISH EFFORTS

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¶8. (C) Many members of Cuba's civil society in Havana had expected that Spain would offer, at the very least, a meeting with one of the high-ranking members of Moratinos' delegation, as it did the last time the Foreign Minister was here in April 2007. Although most civil society members boycotted the meeting then, dismissing it as a pro-forma effort to check a box, many had told us that they would

begrudgingly attend this time, even under the same terms as ¶2007. Instead, Moratinos and his entourage not only blew them off, but announced prior to his visit that the delegation would not meet with them. The GOC has been drawing a tough line with the Europeans lately (Reftel), and there is little doubt that, in the end, the Spanish decided not to chance their official schedule with a civil society activity.

¶9. (C) Not surprisingly, the civil society reaction to the visit was less than enthusiastic. Most were happy that one of their own had been freed, none less than the freed man himself, who told Poloff that he was grateful for the Spanish efforts and agreed with their nuanced approach to Cuba (Septel). Others were scathing. "Offensive, it was downright offensive," Elizardo Sanchez, Amnesty International point person in Cuba told us. Miriam Leiva, whose now-released husband was one of the 75ers, said that U.S., EU and Spanish NGOs deserved more credit for the release than the Spanish government itself. Like Leiva, Laura Pollan, whose 75er husband still sits in jail, said these token releases do little to change existing conditions. Even blogger Yoani Sanchez dismissed the Moratinos visit in her column as a shallow lovefest for the cameras.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) The visit of Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos highlighted the acute differences that exist among the Europeans on Cuba policy. Although the EU split on Cuba is not exactly a secret, it has never been made as public as it was during Moratinos' visit. The Spanish Foreign Minister's open challenge to abandon the Common Position plays straight into the hands of Cuba's strategy of splitting the Europeans, and further weakening their unified position on human rights. The United States can play a constructive role in (quietly) helping shore up sometimes-shaky European resolve, supporting Common Position defenders, and leading the way by example.

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